Penance, promising that she should be vested in it as she desired.

Jacomo di Benincasa had by this time been convinced that his daughter's conduct had a higher sanction, and was not prompted by any childish caprice. He had come upon her unawares, as she prayed in the room of her brother Stefano (the only brother who was still unmarried), and had seen a snow-white dove hovering over her head. And, so, when the girl, ordinarily bashful and silent, suddenly revealed to all the family her vow and her unalterable resolution of having Christ alone for her Spouse, he bade her follow the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for she would meet with no more opposition from him, and enjoined on all the household to leave her in perfect liberty to serve her Divine Bridegroom as she thought fit.

[cc] Then, having obtained this full and long-desired liberty of serving God, the virgin, already entirely dedicated to Him, began zealously and wonderfully to order all her life in the divine service. She asked and obtained a small room separate from the others, in which, as though in the solitude, she could devote herself to God, and afflict her body according to her desire. Here no tongue could narrate with what rigour of penitence she afflicted her body, and with what eagerness of love she sought the countenance of her Spouse. In this little chamber were renewed the olden time works of the holy fathers of Egypt, and all the more wondrously, inasmuch as they were done in her father's house, without any human teaching, example, or guidance."[1]

In order to make this liberty still more secure, Catherine shortly after took the habit of the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic, called in Siena the *Mantellate*—the white robe of innocence and the black mantle of humility in which we still see her clad in the pictures. These *Mantellate* were not nuns, strictly speaking, but devoted themselves to the service of God in their own homes. At first the sisters refused to receive a maiden into their number, as their order was then composed only of widows ; but at length, when Catherine lay ill and assured her mother that,

., I. vi. i (§ 57).